

had several messages for me. The first message was: We have to win this battle.

The group truly believes the contribution their unit had made in the war effort was measurable and positive. One of the guardsmen had been wounded in an IED attack early in the deployment. Thankfully, he was not seriously wounded and he returned to duty. He noted that by the end of the deployment, IEDs were no longer a threat in his area of operation. The message was simply their service had made a difference.

Another message to me was: We cannot afford to lose this fight by simply giving up. I didn't make up that phrase—that a precipitous withdrawal is equivalent to giving up. That is what four veterans of Iraq told me they perceived we were considering doing. They urged us not to do it. Certainly, Iraq cannot be another United States in a short time, they told us. But it can become self-governing and self-sufficient.

The group further stated it may be necessary for us to modify our objectives in this fight, but please don't quit. The senior NCOs finished by telling us they had at least one child, or spouse, on active duty or serving as a reservist or Guard member. This was a testimony—a form of saying to me they and their families believed in what they were doing, even if it meant they have to go back to Iraq again. After making this statement, they were quite polite. They thanked my team for the time they had with us and the few minutes they had to be heard. They came all the way up here to share that.

I say that because I am not hearing the kind of talk from the people who are in Iraq serving our country now that I am hearing from the politicians in Congress. I am not hearing that.

What about Jeff Emanuel, a former special operations veteran of Iraqi Freedom? He wrote an article in the Washington Times recently. He talked about the situation we find ourselves in today. The title of the article is: "Iraqis show courage. Can Congress do the same?"

My colleague from Massachusetts, I think, was a bit too dismissive of the challenges faced by the Iraqi military police and the Iraqi leaders. They have a very difficult challenge, I admit that. I certainly admit that. I think this Nation cannot pour resources into Iraq if we reach the decision it cannot be successful. We will have to extricate ourselves no matter what.

But I have to tell you I don't see it that way right now. This is what Mr. Emanuel said:

... Iraqis in many locations have shown amazing courage, not only by providing an ever-increasing amount of information on insurgent activity to coalition forces, but also by working to rebuild what the insurgents have destroyed, as well as by putting their lives on the line to drive terrorists out of their own villages. They do this despite the fact that they do not know whether they will wake up the next day to find that the coal-

ition—currently their best source of protection—has succumbed to the calls from home (which are heard here by civilians and terrorists alike) to leave Iraq, and has abandoned them.

So they are hearing the talk here. It creates instability and uncertainty for those who want to stand with us and help them to prevail and create a good and decent government in Iraq, if they think we may flee the country the next day. Mr. Emanuel says:

In April and May of this year, and again from the beginning of August through the present, I have been embedded [him personally] in some of the most kinetic combat zones in Iraq, observing General Petraeus's strategy from the ground level in several different locations, and have seen clear evidence of the strategy's effects on the situation there.

I have personally observed clinics in which coalition medics and doctors provided villagers with a level of care that has long been unheard of in the country.

He goes on to say this is still a broken and unstable country. That I do not doubt. Yet progress is inarguably being made, he said. He goes on to note this:

A successful counterinsurgency is one thing, with a timeline which is measured not in months, but in years. However, to wage a successful counterinsurgency and then to build a stable, autonomous and secure state, which we can leave behind without risking its imminent collapse, is another matter altogether.

He went on to note we must not break faith with those who have stood with us and made their commitment.

We all are concerned about the situation in Iraq. The people I talk to—the military people I talk to see us as having a realistic possibility of helping to establish a decent government in Iraq—maybe not the kind of democracy we would like to have seen but something that can work, be a bulwark against an aggressive Iran and be a bulwark in a hostile base against al-Qaida and the terrorists there, who could be an ally to the United States. We have allies in the region. We have a base in Qatar, Bahrain, and we have strong allies in Kuwait and other places in the Middle East. We continue to have those and we will continue to do so. But there is a danger, without a doubt, about an expansive Iran and its leadership who seem to be disconnected from reality in many different ways. Iran's President Ahmadi-Nejad declared a few days ago that U.S. political influence was collapsing rapidly and said Tehran was ready to help fill the power vacuum. He said:

Soon, we will see a huge power vacuum in the region. Of course, we are prepared to fill that gap.

That is from the Philadelphia Inquirer of August 29. So the consequences of what we are doing are serious.

Let me address one more time a rapid precipitous withdrawal and what it means as it is contained in the Levin-Reed amendment. Imagine you are a military commander and you have 160,000 troops in Iraq. You are told you

have 9 months to withdraw everything but a token force to train Iraqis and to protect your own bases and to chase individual al-Qaida members and those associated with them. We are talking about more than a brigade of 5,500 troops a month having to be pulled out. When you have an area of responsibility that has been assigned to a military brigade and you draw those down, then somebody has to assume the responsibility for that territory. How do you do that? That takes time, planning, and care. You can get in a withdrawal or a situation that costs lives and will completely destabilize any progress that has been made. The military commanders have told us it cannot be done. You cannot draw down more than a brigade a month. That is a too fast pace. Remember, it is a brigade that has an area of responsibility of interfacing with American and coalition forces all around it, plus it interfaces with local police, mayors, and tribal leaders, plus it interfaces with the Iraqi Army and Iraqi police.

All of that is part of the responsibility and the relationship that has built up. To precipitously pull out in 9 months all these forces and draw them back to only a few bases and give them a limited responsibility, is a huge, reckless idea that can only result in chaos, confusion and unnecessary death and will destabilize Iraq, destabilize the region perhaps, and cost more lives.

Why don't we listen to what our fabulous general, General Petraeus, has said? He said: I understand we need to draw down these troops. I plan to draw down troops in Iraq. That is certainly my goal.

I will say what I have said many times. The surge was a bitter pill for me. I had certainly hoped that in 2006 we would be drawing down troops, not having to increase troop levels. But that is what we voted to do in this Congress by an 80-to-14 vote. We funded that surge, and now we are getting a report on it.

He said: I have had success by reducing violence in Baghdad and in the country. I am not going to replace a Marine unit that will be departing within a few weeks. That will reduce the numbers. I will bring a brigade home before Christmas and that will be another 5,000-plus personnel. I will continue to draw down next year according to my plan through the summer, and I believe I can achieve a 30,000 troop reduction by next summer.

He said: In March, I will report to the Congress again, and I will tell you what further reductions we can achieve, and I hope to be able to announce further reductions.

That is the kind of withdrawal that is consistent with our ultimate goal, to create a stable and decent Iraq in which the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi police can assume more and more responsibility.